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STATE FOR WHA/BSC, WHA/AND, PM/RSAT
PENTAGON FOR KRISTI HUNT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/09/2018
TAGS: [MARR](#) [PBTS](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [CI](#) [PE](#)
SUBJECT: CHILEAN DEFENSE MINISTER GONI EXPLAINS SPAT WITH
PERU AND DOMESTIC POLITICAL WRANGLING

REF: SANTIAGO 1028 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: CHARGE D, AFFAIRES CAROL URBAN. Reason 1.4.(b) and (d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Chilean Defense Minister Jose Goni briefed Ambassador Paul Simons December 1 on the current tensions between Chile and Peru. Goni explained he and his Peruvian counterpart had tried to defuse the controversy resulting from comments by the Peruvian Army Commander-in-Chief. President Garcia had called to explain the situation to President Bachelet (the first she had heard of it) promising to dismiss the general. However, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs in both countries had publicized the issue, creating a spat that could easily have been avoided. Switching to domestic politics, Goni was concerned the Concertacion's reputation was at risk because of continued internal wrangling over a presidential candidate. Former President Ricardo Lagos was still considering whether to declare his candidacy, and had called Goni to consult. Goni's friends in the Independent Democratic Union (UDI) reported they would reluctantly support Sebastian Pinera as presidential candidate. End Summary.

Snafu with Peru

¶2. (C) Minister Goni related to Ambassador Simons that he had spoken November 29 with his counterpart in Peru, Defense Minister Antero Flores-Araoz. Both had agreed to resolve the simmering tension over Army Commander in Chief General Edwin Donayre's comments quietly and avoid any further controversy. (Note: A YouTube video reportedly made in 2006 at a private party in Peru shows Donayre claiming any Chilean who enters Peru will not be allowed to leave, or will leave in a coffin or plastic bag if they run out of coffins. The video was posted in February but only attracted widespread attention last week. End note.) Minister Flores-Araoz committed to finding a way to have General Donayre resign before his scheduled retirement December 5.

¶3. (C) Goni told the Ambassador he had been with President Bachelet when she received a call from Peruvian President Alan Garcia regarding the controversy. According to Goni, she had previously been unaware of General Donayre's comments. Garcia reportedly told Bachelet he would have the General dismissed immediately.

¶4. (C) According to Goni, the Chilean and Peruvian MFAs decided to publicize the issue. Once public, it was difficult for either the GOC or the GOP to take a more conciliatory approach, the issue became confused, and the

controversy got out of hand. Goni lamented that at the defense level the matter could have been kept under wraps and quickly resolved, and put the blame squarely on the two MFAs.

15. (C) Admiral Rodolfo Codina, Commander in Chief of the Chilean Navy, informed U.S. Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Gary Roughead (in Chile for EXPONAVAL), that he had spoken with his counterpart in Peru. The Commander of the Peruvian Navy, Admiral Carlos Gamarra, told Codina that he and many of his military colleagues in Peru wanted to calm the situation immediately and that the story had been blown up unnecessarily. Gamarra noted neither he nor MOD Flores-Araoz would attend EXPONAVAL (a Chilean sponsored military exhibition, to which Peru had been invited) as originally planned, but he still wanted to send a token delegation (2 Peruvian Admirals). Additionally, Gamarra also ordered the return of the Peruvian missile frigate Quinones, which was also scheduled to represent the Peruvian Navy at EXPONAVAL. Both Navy commanders reaffirmed their commitment to continuing cooperation.

Lagos Still Considering, UDI Lukewarm on Pinera

16. (C) Switching to domestic politics, Goni described a Concertacion (the governing political coalition) in chaos over the question of who will be its presidential candidate in the elections slated for 2009. In Goni's opinion the continued wrangling among the possible candidates, former president Ricardo Lagos, former president Eduardo Frei, and OAS SecGen Jose Miguel Insulza (see ref), was damaging the reputation of the Concertacion.

17. (C) Lagos had called Goni to consult about his possible candidacy. The former president was still wondering whether to throw his hat into the ring. Lagos continued to insist that the price for his agreement to run should be greater control over the different factions within the Concertacion. However, according to Goni, Lagos now recognized this might be difficult to achieve.

18. (C) Goni said his friends in the UDI (center-right) had confided in him that they would likely support Sebastian Pinera (Renovacion Nacional) center right) as the presidential candidate of the Alianza (opposition coalition). However, their support would be reluctant and lukewarm. During separate meetings in the Chilean Congress, December 2, the Ambassador was approached by Senator Carlos Kuschel (Renovacion Nacional). Kuschel emphasized he did not assume a Pinera victory in 2009, despite favorable opinion polls. Kuschel explained the opposition had burned its own bread before, when in earlier elections it had displayed overconfidence in its presidential candidate, only to be beaten by the Concertacion candidate.

URBAN